

Homily for the 21st Sunday of the Year

The scenes coming out of Afghanistan this last week have been truly shocking. Armed Taliban walking the streets, desperate individuals crowding onto the runway at Kabal airport, some even clinging to the undercarriage of a plane as it took off. Then there is the public face of the Taliban leadership calling for trust and the lived reality of those arrested after their homes have been raided. Arguably worst of all is the plight of women and girls who have been told they will have rights but only within Islamic laws. It seems as though the clock has been turned back and the future for many is bleak, how people need to believe the words of the psalm, 'The Lord is close to the broken hearted, those whose spirit is crushed, he will save. Many are the trials of the just, but from them all the Lord will rescue them.'

There will be many people hearing the second reading today who will think the clock has been turned back. The reading illustrates that the early Christians adopted the so called household codes of their day, which were based on subjection, setting out the responsibilities of the different members of the household, husbands at the head, and then wives, children and slaves. To the modern ear this is just plain wrong and a phrase like 'wives should submit to their husbands in everything' is offensive and has given rise to abusive behaviour. Even if we try to balance the sentiment by emphasising that husbands should love their wives 'just as Christ loved the Church', that is with a sacrificial, without reservation, kind of love, the language of submission/obedience on behalf of wives is simply unacceptable.

Speaking of the unacceptable, this is what many of Jesus' followers thought of his teaching about himself as the Bread of Life. 'This is intolerable language, how could anyone accept it?' So Jesus concludes this part of his teaching reminding his hearers that he is the one sent by God, that to accept this calls for faith, and that faith is a gift which not everyone receives or acknowledges. Jesus' words are spirit filled and life giving, but they have to be believed, those listening have to make a choice, and, we are told, at this point, 'many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him.'

Then Jesus addresses the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' It is a turning point in the whole Gospel. Jesus is challenging them to make a decision, to accept the gift of himself as the bread of life, or not. Peter answers with a question, 'Lord to whom shall we go?' and then with an act of faith, 'You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.' Like the disciples we too are asked for a full commitment to Christ, to see beyond the sign of the bread, to the presence of Jesus who literally gives his whole life for us. In the first reading Joshua and his household gave themselves totally to God, an example to their children and their children's children. It is the same for us today. We are asked to respond to the one we receive, to follow him, to share his life with one another, to help our children, and our children's children come to know and follow him, and to be witnesses of his life to the world.

Bidding Prayers for the 21st Sunday of the Year

Celebrant:

The Lord is close to the broken hearted, those whose spirit is crushed he will save. With these words of the psalmist in our hearts and minds we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For Christians everywhere – that they be united in their belief that they have been chosen to be in relationship with God and with one another.

Lord in your mercy

For the people of Afghanistan, especially the women and girls – that at this time of heightened tension all people will be able to live in peace, that their human rights will be accepted and that there will be responsible and enlightened leadership.

Lord in your mercy

For our families – that each member will be given honour, respect and love enabling them to become the people God wants them to be.

Lord in your mercy

For all those who are troubled in body, mind or spirit, especially those with dementia – that they and their families will receive the love and support they need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid-19 pandemic, and Margaret Short, Harry Stott, Eddie Hargreaves, Gareth Davies and Peggy Doran whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

God of love, you have called us to be your own and to praise you in all that we do. Grant us the courage to be faithful and joyful disciples of your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen